



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Haida monumental poles and cultural treasures begin repatriation journey home to Haida Gwaii

Return of culturally sensitive Haida belongings from the City's collection at MOV now underway

VANCOUVER, BC – Today on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, at the ancestral village of Senakw /sən'a?qʷ, the Museum of Vancouver (MOV) hosted a cultural ceremony to mark the repatriation of Haida cultural treasures to Haida Gwaii.

The Haida cultural treasures include two monumental poles, one from MOV and another from UBC's Museum of Anthropology, as well as pole fragments and a number of culturally significant belongings.

For decades, a number of sacred and culturally sensitive belongings from the Haida Nation have been held in the City of Vancouver's collection at MOV. As part of Vancouver's ongoing commitment as a City of Reconciliation, as well as the Haida Now exhibition currently on view, MOV is actively engaged in partnership with the Haida Repatriation Committee, the Council of the Haida Nation and the Haida Gwaii Museum to deaccession and repatriate belongings from the collection to their rightful owners within the Haida Nation.

Given the complex provenance of Haida belongings held at MOV and with the understanding that Haida cultural treasures may have been either taken, appropriated, stolen, or sold, the return of wrongfully acquired cultural treasures to the Haida Nation is a significant milestone. Acknowledging historical events that resulted in the Haida losing their cultural belongings is an important part of repatriation and reconciliation. Today's repatriation ceremony conducted with consent and involvement from each of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, sets a significant precedent in the larger context of governments and museums around the world.

"It's taken over 20 years of the Haida Nation knocking on the doors of mainstream museums. It's taken over one million dollars in cash, sweat-labour, in-kind contributions to bring home and rebury just over 500 of our Ancestors. Now our Nation is focusing on our belongings held in museums. How we found ourselves in this position, why we do this work, and where is taking us (all) is a story that should be known and never be forgotten," says Nika Collison, Co-chair of the Haida Repatriation Committee and Executive Director at the Haida Gwaii Museum, "Despite this history, we see repatriation as a process based on mutual respect, cooperation and trust. We not only pursue the return of our relatives and treasures; we also seek positive relationships with museums. We want people to want to give our relatives back and see our treasures home. We want people to make things right and join us and join us in finding a way forward because they want to, not because they have to."

"The Haida have been preparing for this aspect of Haida Repatriation ever since they began the respectful return of Haida Ancestral Remains over two decades ago," says Vincent Collison, co-chair of the Haida Repatriation Committee, "the Haida Ancestors were deemed a priority and for the most part this precious time of returning our ancestors from museum collections is close to

an end. Now begins a new chapter as the Haida Nation are committed to building a world class collection of Haida Treasures on Haida Gwaii. The Haida Nation looks forward to collaborating, partnering and working with museums and collectors now and into the future. We look forward to a future that comes from our long-storied past for generations of Haida for time immemorial. Howaa to our ancestors for always leading the way."

Today, MOV and its board, staff members and volunteers recognize that these poles and other belongings are of great significance to the Haida Nation and that they should have never been removed from their original home. MOV with the support of the Haida Repatriation Committee, Haida Gwaii Museum, The Council of the Haida Nation, and the City of Vancouver has coordinated the return of the pole to Haida Gwaii in July 2019. – Vince Collison is co-chair of the Haida Repatriation Committee along with Nika Collison, Lucy Bell and Jason Alsop (President of the Haida Nation).

"As a City of Reconciliation, we've committed to creating long-term, systemic change and new relations based on mutual understanding and respect," said Mayor Kennedy Stewart, City of Vancouver. "With this commitment, we must do right by the Haida Ancestors and people by returning these sacred items back home, where they belong."

"The Museum of Vancouver has an active repatriation program. Our staff recognizes that we are caring for many belongings that should not be in a museum, because of their sacred nature or because they were taken under duress. We are committed to acts of redress, such as repatriation, which recognize the authority of indigenous people to reclaim their cultural treasures and knowledge, whether is for continued use in the community or whether it is time to lay these items to rest. When the Haida Gwaii Museum partnered with MOV to create the exhibition, Haida Now, it provided an opportunity for MOV to act upon its mandate of reconciliation and initiate discussions about how to best continue to care for the Haida collections at the museum, and to identify belongings that needed to make the journey home. We are pleased to have the support of the Mayor and City Council on this historic initiative," says Sharon Fortney, Curator of Indigenous Collections and Engagement at MOV.

Within the Haida Now exhibition, currently on view at MOV, is a display featuring the xaad kil term Yahguudangang which means "To Pay Respect". According to Nika Collison, "Yahguudangang is changing the path of Haida history and Canada's history. It has changed how some museum staff see their own settler histories and their institutions' histories. Entering into Yahguudangang helps museum staff address or heal from the shame of colonialism. The bigger shame, then, becomes not working toward repatriation."

Repatriation, a vital aspect of the reconciliation process, is a priority area for the Museum of Vancouver's current and future mandate. With the help of other cultural organizations, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, and the City of Vancouver, MOV will continue to actively address repair and return of sacred items and cultural treasures currently held in the City-owned collection to their rightful owners in Indigenous communities.

About Museum of Vancouver (museumofvancouver.ca)

The Museum of Vancouver connects Vancouverites to each other and connects Vancouver to the world. The museum's programs, exhibitions, and collections bring people together and inspire conversation about the future. The museum, an enthusiastic civic advocate, is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to inspiring a socially connected, civically engaged city.

About the Haida Repatriation Committee

The Haida Repatriation Committee is a grass-roots group of volunteers from the Haida Nation who've dedicated their lives to bringing home Haida Ancestral remains and belongings from global museums with honour and respect.

About the Haida Gwaii Museum (haidagwaiimuseum.ca)

The Haida Gwaii Museum's mandate is Haida Gwaii, its vision is to inspire understanding and respect for all that Haida Gwaii is. Community-driven, the museum's main focus is historic and contemporary Haida language, art and culture, and also works in tandem with the Haida Repatriation Committee. The museum also presents the natural and Settler history of Haida Gwaii and an annual program of art exhibitions and public programming.

About the Council of the Haida Nation (CHN) (haidanation.ca)

CHN is the Haida national government. Rooted in the power of hereditary law, CHN acts at the direction of Haida citizens as they vote through direct democracy. CHN's primary purpose is to uphold Haida Title, rights and responsibility to Haida Gwaii.

About the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) (moa.ubc.ca)

Since its inception, MOA has been at the forefront of bringing Indigenous art into the mainstream by collecting and curating traditional and contemporary Indigenous art in a way that respects the artists and the cultures from which this work comes. MOA resides on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam people and works by Musqueam artists welcome visitors to the site.

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